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Written statement* submitted by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Statement by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD)

The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) is a human rights and peace organization established in 1997 to end Israel's Occupation over the Palestinians. Its main focus is Israel's policy of demolishing Palestinian homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and in Israel proper.

Nothing demonstrates the existence of one (apartheid) state more graphically than Israel's policy of house demolitions. Since 1948, Israel has demolished almost 100,000 Palestinian homes. At least 52,000 have occurred within the state of Israel itself - from 1948 and the years immediately following when the new state was established and more than 530 Palestinian villages were demolished but also including the thousands more demolitions that continue to happen to this day. Within the OPT – East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza - there have been nearly 42,000 demolitions since 1967. These are not only individual homes but businesses, livestock facilities and other structures vital to Palestinian life. Even today entire communities are being been uprooted and destroyed thus the very fabric of Palestinian society is being eliminated. Historians have described this as a process of ethnic cleansing. Israel officially calls it "judaization" which is continuing today on *both sides* of the "Green Line", thus throughout all of historic Palestine.

According to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in 2015, a total of 521 Palestinian structures were demolished by the Israeli authorities in the OPT, with 636 Palestinians, forcibly evicted from their homes and subsequently displaced. Palestinians are also otherwise affected, for example, due to demolitions of animal shelters, water cisterns and other structures related to their livelihood or because of the destruction of infrastructure, including roads.

There are more than 11,000 outstanding demolitions orders in Area C of the West Ban affecting 13,000 structures and 8000 people in 61 communities in the West Bank are at high risk of forcible transfer due to Israel's expanding settlements. More than 20,000 demolition orders have been distributed to Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem.

Following Israel's bombardment of Gaza in 2014, more than 18,000 Palestinian homes were demolished and only a few have been rebuilt due to the continuing siege on Gaza which has not allowed building materials to enter therefore 95,000 people are still displaced in Gaza.

Areas of specific concern include the serious escalation of demolitions and displacement in the Jordan Valley and in the South Hebron Hills; almost daily demolitions in E Jerusalem;; the resumption of punitive demolitions; and Israel's attempt to demolish and displace entire communities within the state of Israel, namely Umm Al-Hiran and Atir in the Negev and Dahmash, near Lod. Even EU-funded structures provided under its humanitarian scheme are being demolished.

Under the Oslo Accords, powers and responsibilities related to zoning and planning in Area C should have been transferred to Palestinian control but that has not happened. In 2014, ICAHD along with Rabbis for Human Rights – Israel, the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Centre, the Society of St. Yves (Catholic Human Rights Centre in Jerusalem) and the Palestinian village of Ad-Dirat- Al-Rfai'ya presented a petition to Israel's Supreme Court requesting that planning authority be returned to Palestinians living in Area C. The petition was finally dismissed outright in June 2015 therefore legitimizing a regime of separation and discrimination in planning. In Area C, some two-thirds of the Occupied West Bank, Palestinians face home demolitions and displacement, while illegal Israeli settlements flourish. A mere 1% of Area C is currently designated for the development of Palestinian villages, compared to 27% for settlements.

For Palestinians, the Jordan Valley represents an essential land reserve, agricultural hinterland and strategic economic infrastructure as well as providing the "potential state's" sole land entrance. However Israel has coveted the Jordan Valley and has justified its presence there as necessary for security. Israel now controls over 90 percent of the Jordan valley. Before 1967, 300,000 Palestinians lived in the Jordan Valley; today there are 56,000. House demolitions, forced evictions and property confiscations, exacerbated by settler violence and the economic effects of movement restrictions, have left Palestinian communities struggling to make a living. OCHA reported that between 9 -11 February 2016, **the**

Israeli authorities destroyed at least 80 homes and livelihood-related structures in seven Palestinian communities in Area C, all but one of the demolitions were in the Jordan Valley, displacing approximately 60 people, half of them children. This is just one illustration of Israel's escalation of demolitions during 2016.

In one of the biggest demolition operations in a decade in the West Bank, happened on 2nd February 2016 when, 110 people (70 children) were made homeless **in the South Hebron Hills**. Residents of the area had resisted Israeli efforts to expel them for years. In the meantime, Israel has allowed for the establishment of Jewish settlements in the area.

This year Israel's Civil Administration and members of the IDF have demolished Palestinian residential structures of the Bedouin herding communities in the much contested area of E1, adjacent to and northeast of Jerusalem where Israel intends to establish the new settlement of Mevasseret Adumin which would connect the settlement of Maale Adumin with Jerusalem. On 6th January, in Abu a-Nuwar, residential structures for five families were demolished displacing 28 people, including 18 minors while three residential structures were demolished in Badu al-Baba on 21st January, displacing fourteen people including six children. The plan had been frozen since 2009 because of international pressure however now the fear is that Israel will progress this displacement that will also result a crescent of Israeli settlements around East Jerusalem dividing it from the rest of the West Bank and its Palestinian population centres while also bisecting the West Bank creating yet more facts on the ground to prove that a viable Palestinian state is no longer possible.

Israel's policy of punitive demolitions has been re-instated following its near abandonment in 2005 when an Israeli military committee concluded that not only was the policy of punitive demolitions ineffective in deterring terrorism, but it actually incited additional attacks. Punitive demolitions began again in the summer of 2014, after the abduction and murder of three Israeli teenagers in the occupied West Bank. Since then, more than two dozen Palestinian homes have been demolished as a punitive measure,

Within the state of Israel, the government seeks to target non-Jewish Israeli citizens for demolitions and displacement. Two of the "unrecognized" Bedouin villages of Um al-Hiran and Atir in the Negev, home to 1,200 inhabitants, are slated for demolition with the people moved to the overcrowded township of Hura. Israel wants to build a Jewish community, to be called Hiran, on the rubble of the homes of their fellow citizens in the Bedouin village of Um al Hiran and to expand Yatir forest on the site of Atir.

Homes remain under threat in Dahmash, located between Lod and Ramle, where 700 Israeli Palestinian citizens reside, Dahmash remains "unrecognized" despite Israel displacing these families there in 1951 where like in other unrecognized communities there are no basic services, such as schools, paved roads, sewage and drainage system, kindergartens, and health facilities. In April 2015, five homes were demolished on grounds that they did not have a building permit. Three were rebuilt and in August they were demolished. Almost every one of the 70 houses in Dahmash is considered "illegal" by Israel and 13 houses are under immanent threat of demolition.

Recommendations

- ICAHD calls on the state of Israel to dismantle its system of institutionalized discrimination over the Palestinian people, to repeal all discriminatory laws, and to cease forthwith acts of persecution against Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Israel;

- ICAHD calls on the Council to forcefully insist on the application of IHL in the OPT, to act vigorously to protect the Palestinian people and its fundamental human rights and to call for an end of forced eviction and displacement as the result of the demolition of Palestinian property which causes displacement and dispossession..

- ICAHD calls for all refugees and internally displaced persons who have been forcibly displaced to be allowed to repatriate, return to their homes in safety and dignity, and be given compensation for any harm they have suffered.

- ICAHD calls all states, intergovernmental organizations and civil society to cooperate to bring to an end the illegal situation arising from Israel's practices of apartheid and persecution. All states and IGOs must consider appropriate measures to exert sufficient pressure on Israel, including the imposition of sanctions.

- ICAHD calls on the United Nations' Human Rights Council to adopt the above mentioned recommendations.

- ICAHD calls on the Council to reiterate its position and that of other UN and international agencies that the demolition of Palestinian homes, the expropriation of Palestinian land and the forced displacement that results are not only illegal under internationai law but are an obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights by the whole Palestinian population.

- ICAHD calls for an end to the Occupation of the Palestinian Territory